



Representative vs. Direct Democracy: Lesson Plan

| Topic | |
|---|---------------|
| A representative democracy is a system of government where citizens elect representatives to vote on laws on their behalf. A direct democracy is one where citizens vote on every issue themselves. The key difference between the two systems is <i>who</i> is voting on laws, elected officials or the citizens. | |
| Possible subjects/classes | Time needed |
| Government, Civics, History | 30-45 minutes |
| Video link: | |
| https://academy4sc.org/topic/representative-vs-direct-democracy-power-of-the-people/ | |
| Objective: <i>What will students know/be able to do at the end of class?</i> | |
| Students will be able to... <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Distinguish between direct and representative types of democracy.• Explain the development of the types of democracy in the context of ancient societies.• Analyze the benefits and costs of both types of democracy in the United States and globally. | |
| Key Concepts & Vocabulary | |
| Democracy, Elected official | |
| Materials Needed | |
| Worksheet, Board/Screen (Poll the class introduction) | |
| Before you watch | |
| Poll the class: Ask students to name ways that citizens can participate in democracy. Then ask them to name the ways that representatives participate in democracy. Make a public list of their answers. | |



While you watch

1. What is the key difference between representative democracy and direct democracy?
2. Where did both types of democracy originate?
3. List one consequence, positive or negative, of the United States being a representative democracy.

After you watch/discussion questions

1. Can you identify ways that society uses both direct and representative democracy outside of the political process? There may be some examples in your school.
2. Do you think representative democracy or direct democracy is the better system of government? Why?
3. Do you think the United States should become a direct democracy? Why or why not?

Activity Ideas

- **Democracy Design:** Ask students (either in groups or individually) to put themselves in the role of the Founders and design their own forms of democracy. Their ideas can combine existing forms of democracy or be more creative. After students have designed their democracies, share and discuss as a class, focusing on how citizens participate in the political process and share their input.
- **Popular Vote Model:** Divide students into groups with an odd number of people. Pose a few polarizing but inconsequential two-option questions to the class, like which popular soda brand is better or whether pineapple belongs on pizza. Allow groups to briefly debate among themselves before recording their individual answers to each question. Have the whole class vote by a show of hands and record the results. Now, select one student at random from each group to act as the representative. Take another vote with just the representative students. Have students identify which type of democracy they are participating in and compare the vote results. Were the results of each election different? Debrief as a class.
- **Debate:** Split the students in half and have each side list all of the arguments they can for one of the forms of democracy. Make sure the students consider multiple perspectives, including independent voters, minorities, career government workers, or historically disenfranchised groups.



Sources/places to learn more

1. National Geographic Society. "Democracy (Ancient Greece)." *National Geographic Society*, 15 Mar. 2019.
<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/democracy-ancient-greece/>.
2. Saward, Michael. "Representative and Direct Democracy." *Understanding Democratic Politics: An Introduction*, SAGE Publications, 2003, pp. 52–60.
https://books.google.com/books?id=lzqPNeEY_boC&printsec=copyright&source=gbs_pub_info_r#v=onepage&q&f=false.
3. Wike, Richard, et al. "Support for Democracy High Around the World." *Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project*, Pew Research Center, 16 Oct. 2017.
<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2017/10/16/globally-broad-support-for-representative-and-direct-democracy/>.